

F A B L E S

WILLINGHAM BUCKINGHAM LEIALOHA

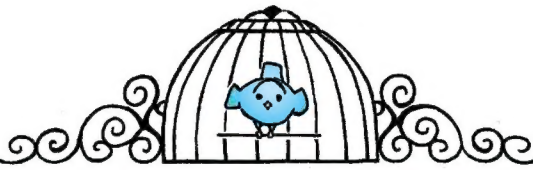
SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

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VERTIGO



"MANAGING AN EMPIRE IS A TRICKY BUSINESS. IT CAN ONLY PROSPER AS LONG AS IT CONTINUES TO GROW."

SIRE, I REGRET TO SAY I'M PLACING YOU UNDER ARREST.

WHAT? BUT I--!

YOU'RE THE CAPTAIN OF MY PERSONAL GUARD. HOW CAN YOU TURN ON ME SO SUDDENLY?

"SMALL ONES HAVE TO STRIVE TO BECOME **BIG** ONES. THAT'S THE NATURE OF THINGS."



"AND I HAVE TO ADMIT, I'D DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR IT. BETTER I RULE THAN ANYONE ELSE WHO MIGHT NOT TURN OUT TO BE SO BENEVOLENT."

THE NEW KING'S RIDING THIS WAY AT THE HEAD OF HIS VERY LARGE ARMY.

AND HE PROMISED TO SPARE THE CITY--

--IF THE FIRST THING HE SAW ON ARRIVAL WAS **YOUR** HEAD ON A PIKE.



"OF COURSE, I COULDN'T KEEP EXPANDING MY FLEDGLING EMPIRE STRICTLY THROUGH SUBTERFUGE."

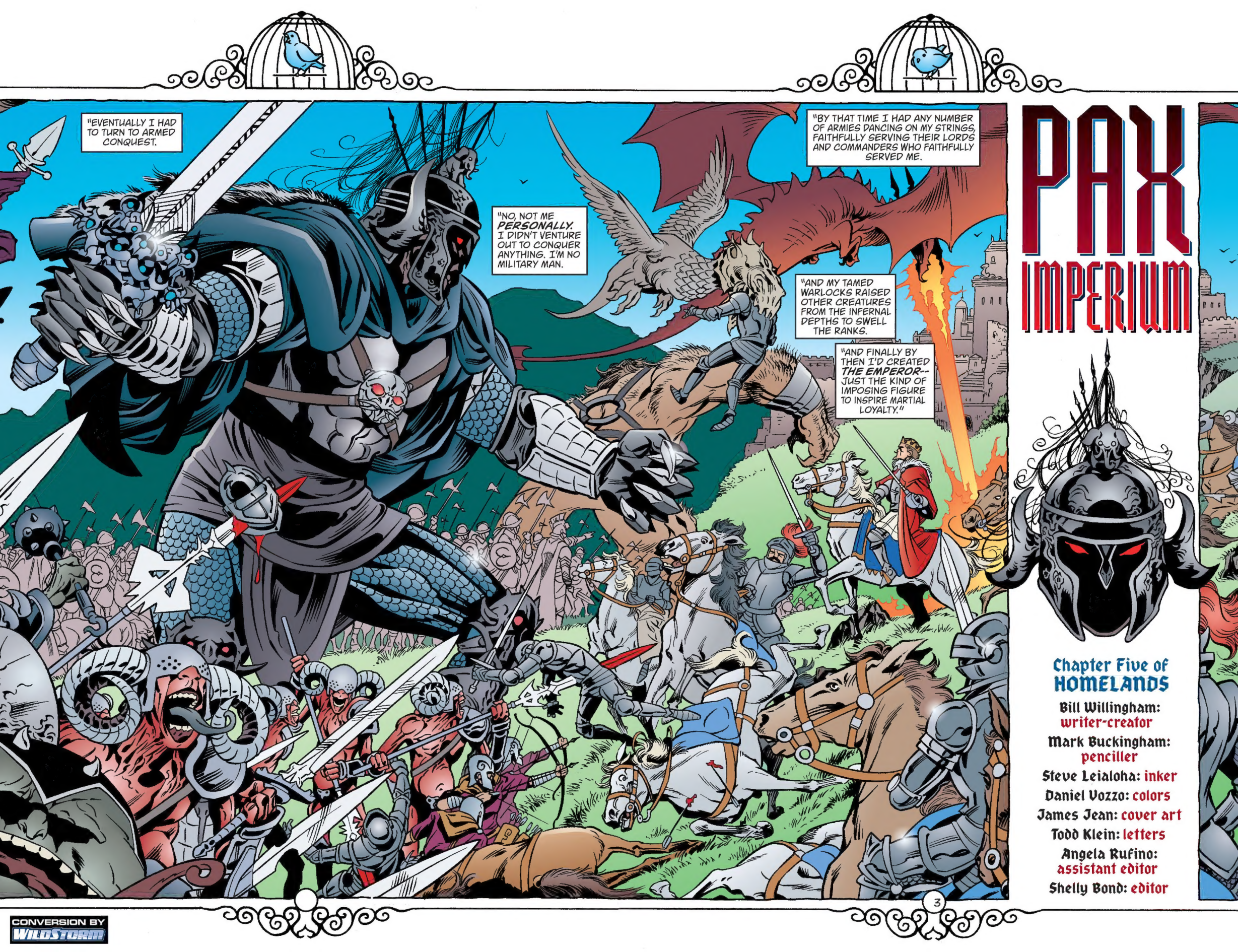
I'M BEGGING YOU!

"I COULDN'T CONTINUE TO SECRETLY COPY AND REPLACE LOCAL LEADERS, BECAUSE THE ONES FARTHER AWAY WERE STRANGERS TO ME."

NOTHING PERSONAL, SIRE. IT'S JUST POLITICS.

HOLD HIM STILL, MEN.





"EVENTUALLY I HAD TO TURN TO ARMED CONQUEST."

"NO, NOT ME PERSONALLY. I DIDN'T VENTURE OUT TO CONQUER ANYTHING. I'M NO MILITARY MAN."

"BY THAT TIME I HAD ANY NUMBER OF ARMIES DANCING ON MY STRINGS, FAITHFULLY SERVING THEIR LORDS AND COMMANDERS WHO FAITHFULLY SERVED ME."

"AND MY TAMED WARLOCKS RAISED OTHER CREATURES FROM THE INFERNAL DEPTHS TO SWELL THE RANKS."

"AND FINALLY BY THEN I'D CREATED THE EMPEROR-- JUST THE KIND OF IMPOSING FIGURE TO INSPIRE MARTIAL LOYALTY."

PAX IMPERIUM



Chapter Five of HOMELANDS

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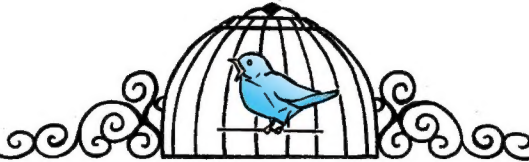
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AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE I LET OTHERS RUN THINGS--MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS MOSTLY.

I'M CONTENT TO STAY HERE IN MY COZY WORKSHOP, OCCASIONALLY SETTING BROAD GOALS AND POLICIES, BUT EVEN *THAT* NECESSITY'S BECOME RARE THESE DAYS.



SO HOW MANY SIBS DO I HAVE, POPS?

BY NOW? THOUSANDS, I WOULD THINK. MAYBE *TENS* OF THOUSANDS.

ARE YOU SERIOUS?



LET'S SEE-- AN AVERAGE OF TWENTY A YEAR TIMES A DOZEN CENTURIES?

WOW.



AND EVERY ONE OF THEM IS BETTER BEHAVED THAN *YOU*, MY LITTLE RASCAL. SUCH *TERRIBLE* NAMES YOU CALLED ME WHEN YOU WOKE UP THIS MORNING.

HEY, GIVE ME A *BREAK*, OKAY? I ALREADY *APOLOGIZED* TEN MILLION BILLION TIMES.

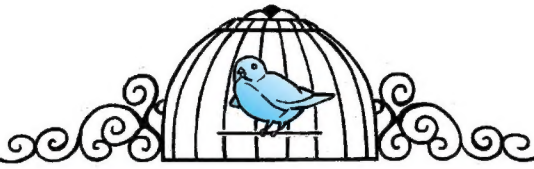


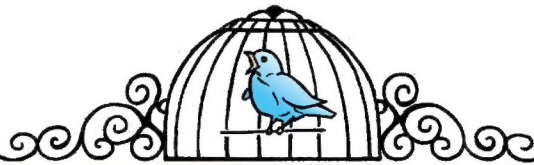
I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN A MILLENNIUM AND I FELT DISORIENTED-- LIKE I WAS ON DAY FIVE OF A SIX-DAY *BENDER*.

YES, THE TRANSFORMATION AFFECTS SOME OF YOU THAT WAY.

I NEVER COULD USE THE BLUE FAIRY'S POWER WITH HER SUBTLETY.

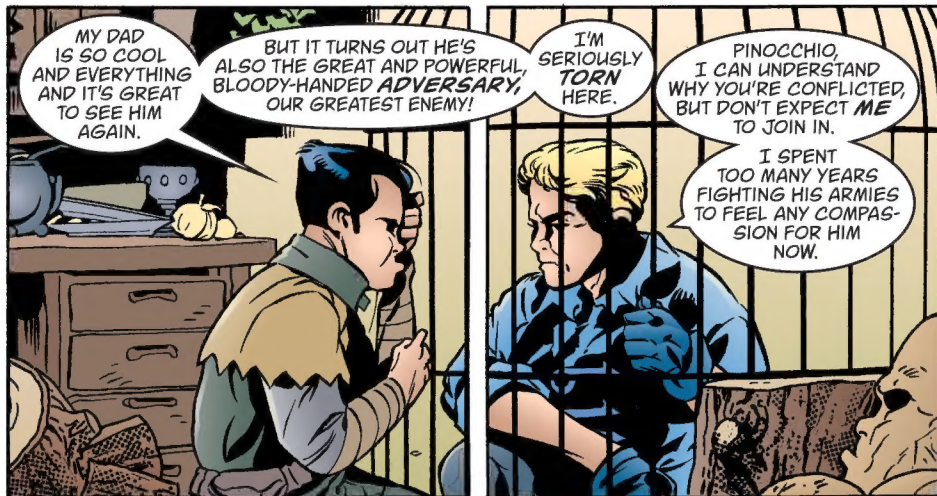






LATER THAT AFTERNOON.

SO WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO, BLUE?



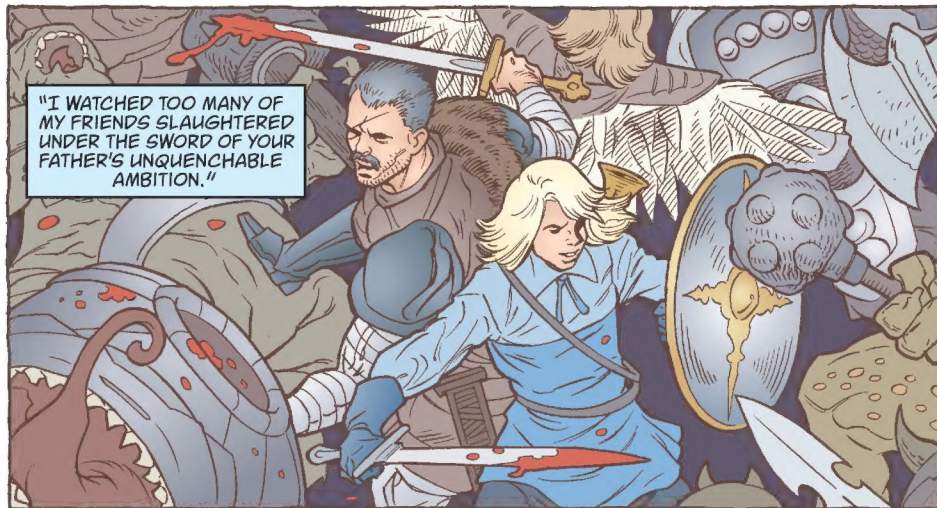
MY DAD IS SO COOL AND EVERYTHING AND IT'S GREAT TO SEE HIM AGAIN.

BUT IT TURNS OUT HE'S ALSO THE GREAT AND POWERFUL, BLOODY-HANDED **ADVERSARY**, OUR GREATEST ENEMY!

I'M SERIOUSLY **TORN** HERE.

PINOCCHIO, I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE CONFLICTED, BUT DON'T EXPECT **ME** TO JOIN IN.

I SPENT TOO MANY YEARS FIGHTING HIS ARMIES TO FEEL ANY COMPASSION FOR HIM NOW.



"I WATCHED TOO MANY OF MY FRIENDS SLAUGHTERED UNDER THE SWORD OF YOUR FATHER'S UNQUENCHABLE AMBITION."

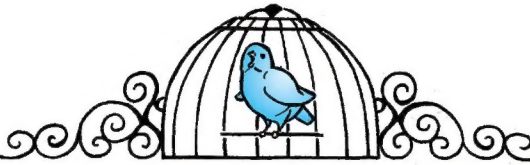


I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE SOME **BIG-TIME SWASH-BUCKLING WARRIOR** HERO BEFORE I MET YOU IN FABLETOWN.

AND NOW HEARING ALL THE AMAZING THINGS YOU DID FIGHTING YOUR WAY HERE.

HOLY **FUCKING WOW**, MAN! YOU'RE LIKE SOME KIND OF **GIANT SUPERHERO!**





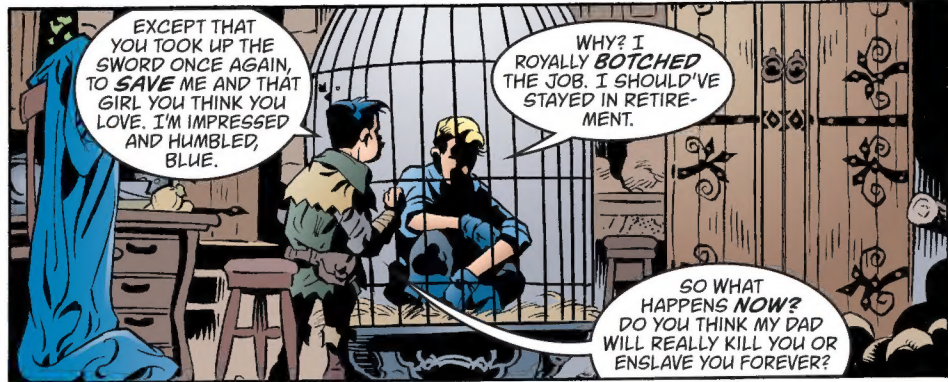
DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY, BRO.

YOU'RE MY BEST BUDDY, BUT I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST SOME NICE, NERDY, BOOKWORM OFFICE DRONE WITH DELUSIONS OF MUSICAL TALENT.



AFTER MY YEARS FIGHTING IN THE HOMELANDS IN SO MANY LOSING BATTLES, THAT'S ALL I WANT TO BE--AN ORDINARY FUNCTIONARY IN A DULL OFFICE JOB.

I'VE USED UP ALL MY BRAVERY AND ANY DESIRE FOR GLORY.



EXCEPT THAT YOU TOOK UP THE SWORD ONCE AGAIN, TO SAVE ME AND THAT GIRL YOU THINK YOU LOVE. I'M IMPRESSED AND HUMBLLED, BLUE.

WHY? I ROYALLY **BOTCHED** THE JOB. I SHOULD'VE STAYED IN RETIREMENT.

SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW? DO YOU THINK MY DAD WILL REALLY KILL YOU OR ENSLAVE YOU FOREVER?



I SUSPECT SO. NO MATTER **HOW** NICE HIS OLD DUFFER EXTERIOR, NO ONE COLD ENOUGH TO CONQUER A HUNDRED WORLDS WILL **EVER** BE KNOWN FOR HIS ACTS OF MERCY.

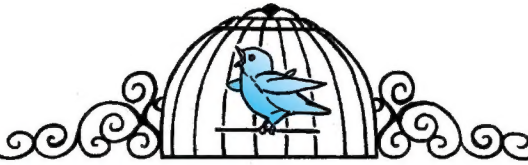


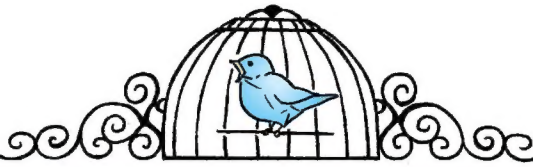
WHO KNOWS, THOUGH? HE SEEMS TO SINCERELY APPRECIATE THAT I RESTORED YOU TO HIM.

HEY, IT GOT COLD LAST NIGHT. CAN YOU HAND ME THAT CLOAK DRAPED OVER THE CHAIR THERE?

SURE, BUDDY.







THE NEXT DAY.

THIS IS AS FAR AS YOU AND YOUR TROOPS GO, SERGEANT KROAK.

WE'RE NEARING THE OLD MAN'S CABIN AND APPARENTLY HE CAN'T ABIDE THE PRESENCE OF ANY OF THE LOWER RACES.

FINE WITH US, CAP'N HINTERFOX. YOU WANT US TO WAIT HERE, OR CAN WE GO DOWN INTO THE CITY?



YOU CAN GO DOWN INTO THE CITY, BUT MAKE SURE I CAN FIND YOU.

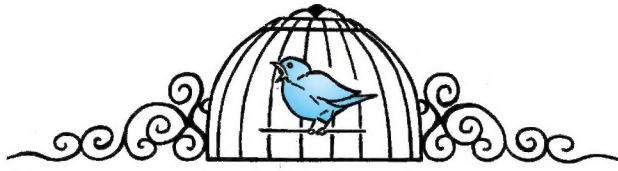
SIGN IN AT THE ENLISTED-GOB'S TRANSIT BARRACKS AND LET SOMEONE THERE KNOW WHERE YOU ARE AT ALL TIMES.

NO GOBS ALLOWED UP THERE, CAPTAIN?

I'M SURPRISED THAT YOU HAVE TO HEED THE SOCIAL PREJUDICES OF SOME UNEDUCATED OLD PEASANT WOODCARVER.

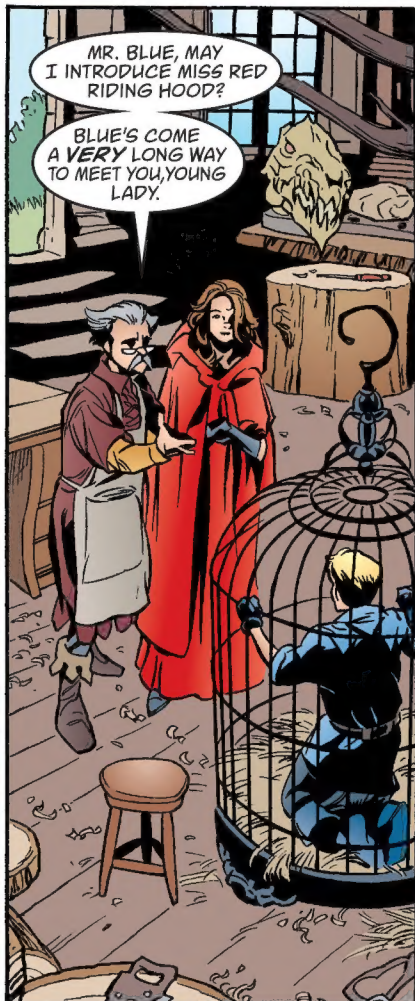
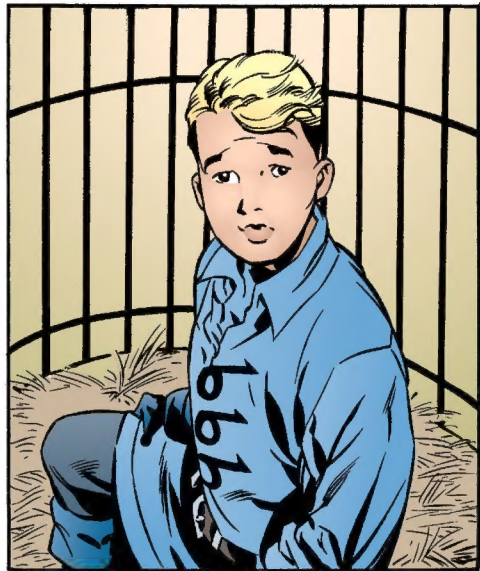
NO, WHAT I HAVE TO HEED IS THE VERY SPECIFIC AND DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS OF MY HIGHLY EDUCATED COMMANDING COLONEL, MISS RIDING HOOD.





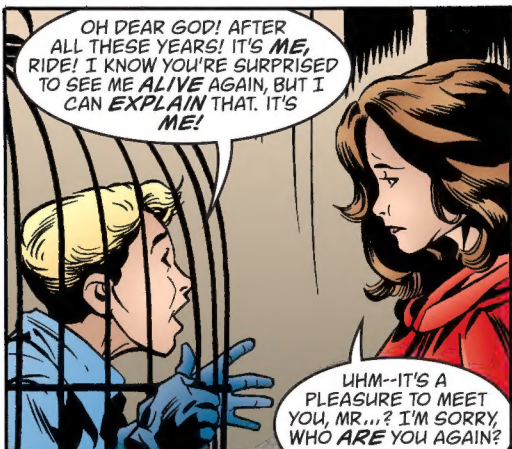
SORRY TO INTERRUPT THE REUNION, BOYS, BUT PINOCCHIO, SON, COULD YOU STEP OUTSIDE FOR A MOMENT?

BOY BLUE HAS ANOTHER VISITOR.



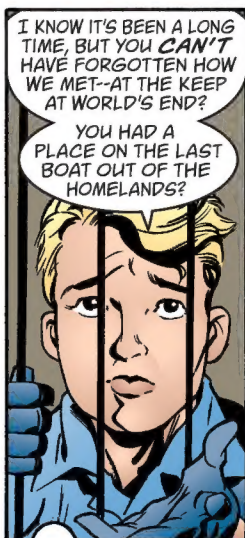
MR. BLUE, MAY I INTRODUCE MISS RED RIDING HOOD?

BLUE'S COME A VERY LONG WAY TO MEET YOU, YOUNG LADY.



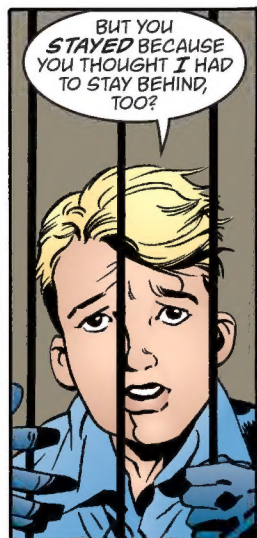
OH DEAR GOD! AFTER ALL THESE YEARS! IT'S *ME*, RIDE! I KNOW YOU'RE SURPRISED TO SEE ME *ALIVE* AGAIN, BUT I CAN *EXPLAIN* THAT. IT'S *ME!*

UHM--IT'S A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, MR...? I'M SORRY, WHO *ARE* YOU AGAIN?



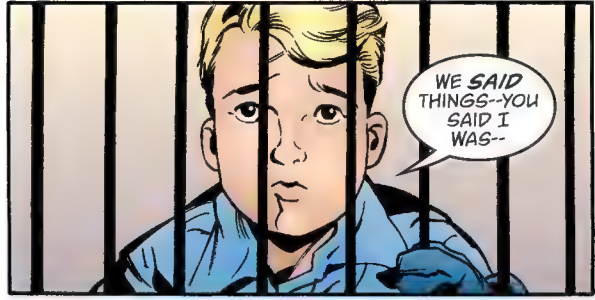
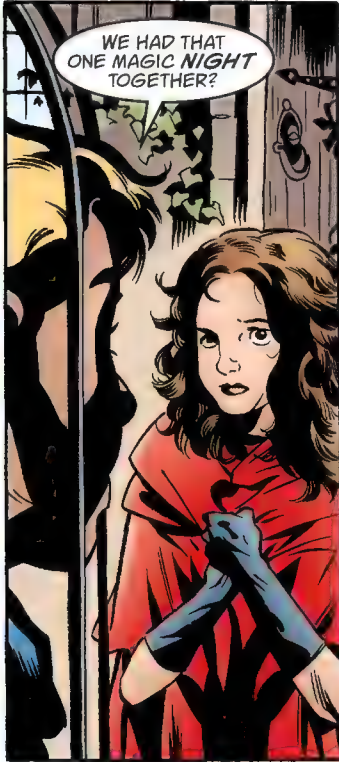
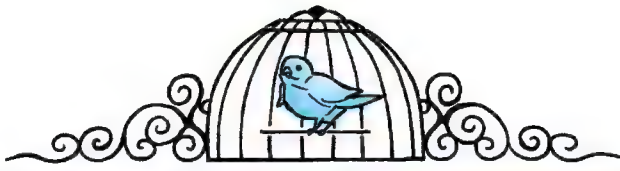
I KNOW IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, BUT YOU *CAN'T* HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW WE MET--AT THE KEEP AT WORLD'S END?

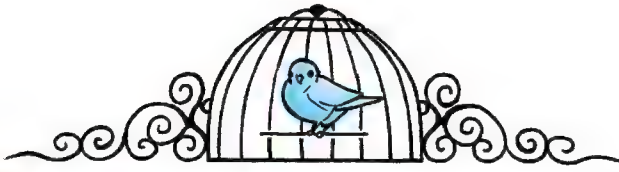
YOU HAD A PLACE ON THE LAST BOAT OUT OF THE HOMELANDS?



BUT YOU *STAYED* BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT *I* HAD TO STAY BEHIND, TOO?







YOU WANTED TO MEET THE REAL RIDING HOOD AND I DELIVERED HER TO YOU--AS PROMISED.

BUT THE GIRL I MET AT WORLD'S END--

WAS FALSE-- ONE OF MY SPIES-- JUST LIKE THE ONE YOU MET IN FABLE-TOWN.



BULLSHIT. EVEN AFTER NEARLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS, I COULD TELL THEY WEREN'T THE SAME WOMAN.

TRUE. THEY WEREN'T QUITE THE SAME.

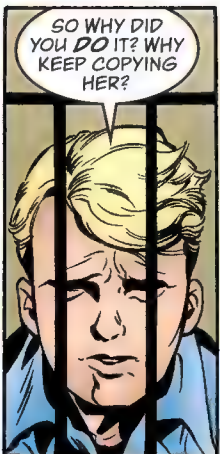
BABA YAGA DUPLICATED RIDING HOOD ON THE FABLE-TOWN MISSION...

...WHEREAS SOME OTHER SORCERESS DUPLICATED HER IN THAT BATTLE LONG AGO.

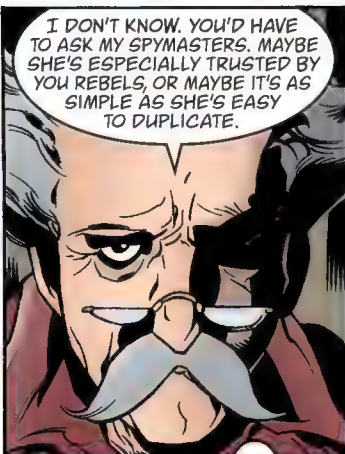


I'M NOT SURE WHO. I'M SORRY I DON'T HAVE MORE DETAILS, BUT, AS I TOLD YOU, I SELDOM INVOLVE MYSELF IN THE FINE POINTS OF OUR MILITARY OR ESPIONAGE OPERATIONS.

I'M SUCH A GIGANTIC FOOL.



SO WHY DID YOU DO IT? WHY KEEP COPYING HER?

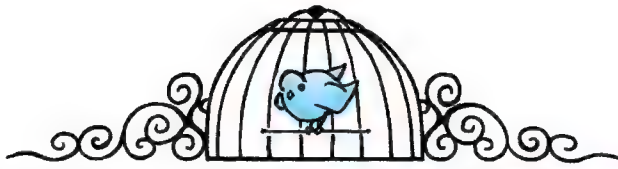


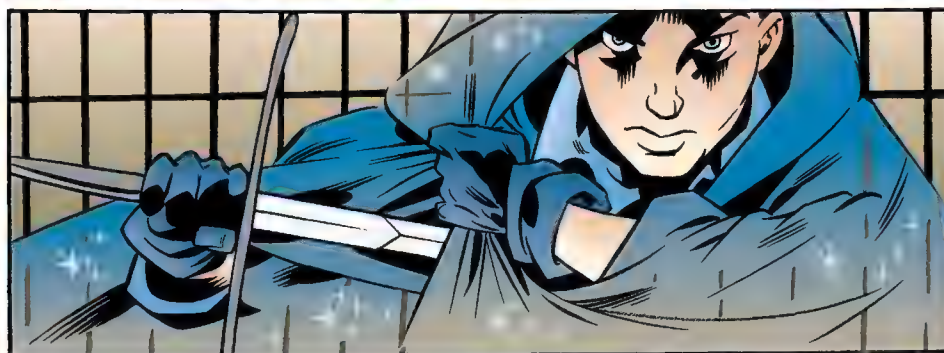
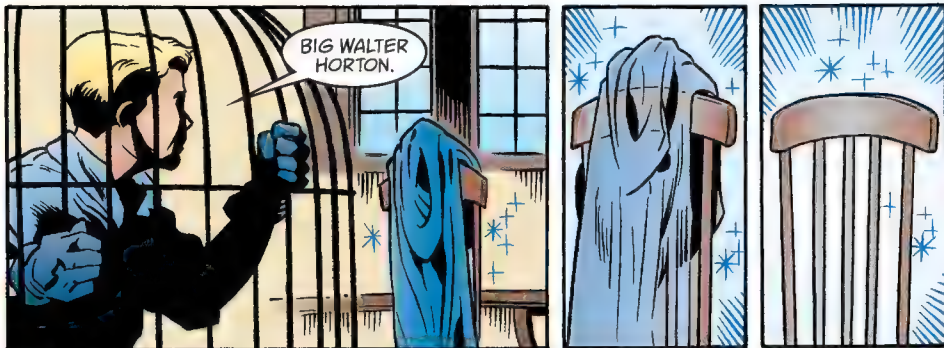
I DON'T KNOW. YOU'D HAVE TO ASK MY SPYMASTERS. MAYBE SHE'S ESPECIALLY TRUSTED BY YOU REBELS, OR MAYBE IT'S AS SIMPLE AS SHE'S EASY TO DUPLICATE.

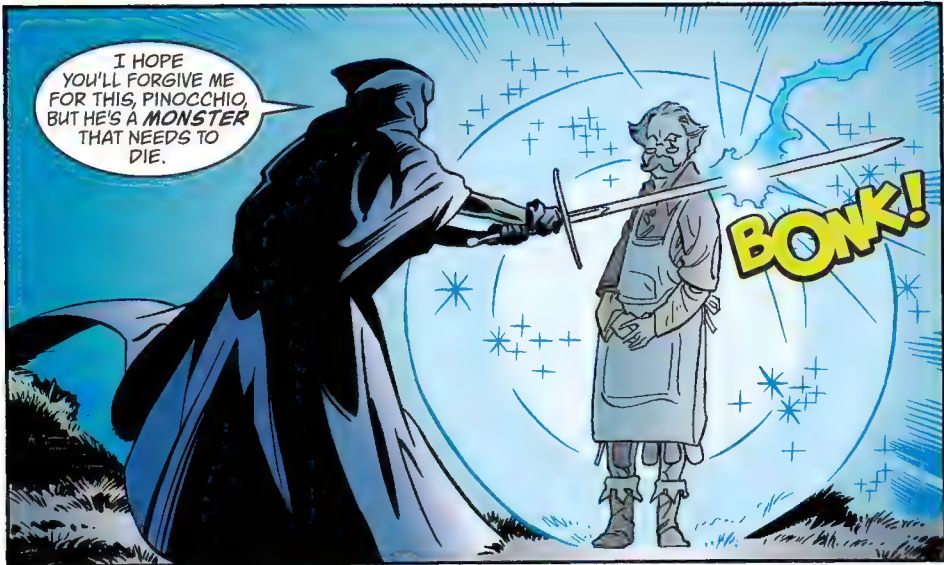


NOT EVERYONE CAN BE COPIED EXACTLY-- OR MORE THAN ONCE.



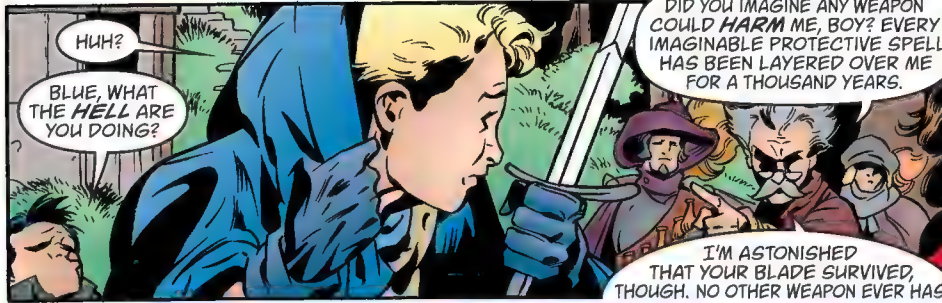






I HOPE YOU'LL FORGIVE ME FOR THIS, PINOCCHIO, BUT HE'S A **MONSTER** THAT NEEDS TO DIE.

BONK!



HUH?

BLUE, WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?

DID YOU IMAGINE ANY WEAPON COULD HARM ME, BOY? EVERY IMAGINABLE PROTECTIVE SPELL HAS BEEN LAYERED OVER ME FOR A THOUSAND YEARS.

I'M ASTONISHED THAT YOUR BLADE SURVIVED, THOUGH. NO OTHER WEAPON EVER HAS.



GUARDS, KILL THIS PUP!

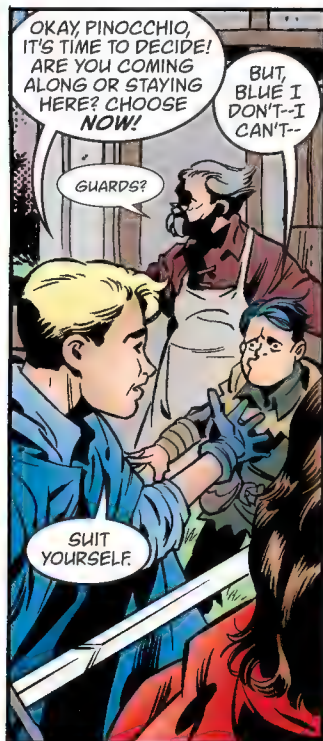
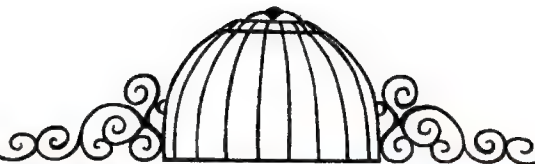
SNICKER-SNACK!



BLUE?

SNICKER-SNACK!





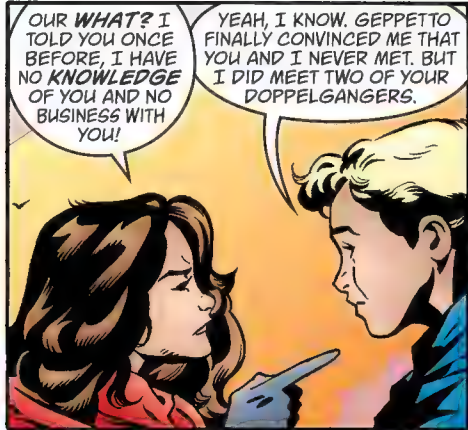


WILL YOU PLEASE UNHAND ME, SIR?!



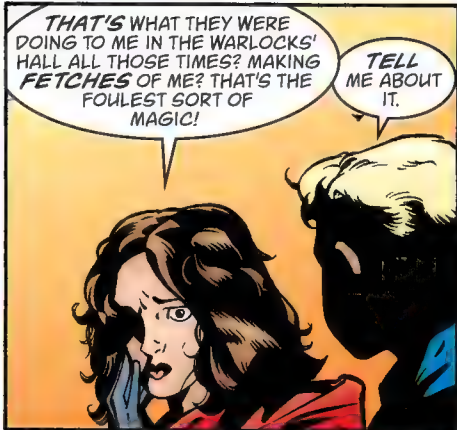
YOU KILLED THOSE MEN!

THEY SORT OF FORCED THE ISSUE. I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO FIND A LESS BLOODY SOLUTION TO OUR DILEMMA.



OUR WHAT? I TOLD YOU ONCE BEFORE, I HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF YOU AND NO BUSINESS WITH YOU!

YEAH, I KNOW. GEPPETTO FINALLY CONVINCED ME THAT YOU AND I NEVER MET. BUT I DID MEET TWO OF YOUR DOPPELGANGERS.



THAT'S WHAT THEY WERE DOING TO ME IN THE WARLOCKS' HALL ALL THOSE TIMES? MAKING FETCHES OF ME? THAT'S THE FOULEST SORT OF MAGIC!

TELL ME ABOUT IT.



LISTEN UP, LADY. I DID YOU A BAD TURN BY DRAGGING YOU INTO THIS MESS, BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.

IF I LET YOU GO NOW, THEY'D LIKELY DO EVIL THINGS TO YOU WHEN THEY CATCH YOU.



AND THEY WILL CATCH YOU.



WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO TO ME?

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO COME WITH ME TO FABLETOWN. I'M SORRY I COULDN'T OFFER YOU A CHOICE IN THE MATTER.



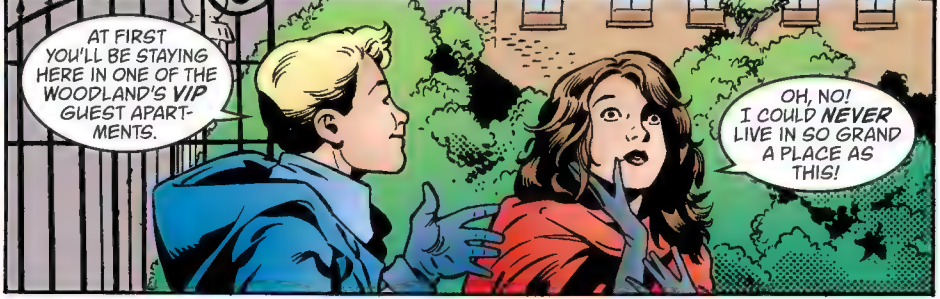


THIS WILL BE YOUR NEW HOME--FOR A WHILE AT LEAST.



WE SEEM TO HAVE ARRIVED PRETTY EARLY IN THE DAY. GOOD. WE'LL WANT TO INTRODUCE YOU AROUND SLOWLY. GRADUALLY.

OUR LAST ARRIVAL WHO LOOKED LIKE YOU DIDN'T TREAT US VERY WELL.



AT FIRST YOU'LL BE STAYING HERE IN ONE OF THE WOODLAND'S VIP GUEST APARTMENTS.

OH, NO! I COULD NEVER LIVE IN SO GRAND A PLACE AS THIS!



LATER YOU CAN CHOOSE TO LIVE HERE IN FABLETOWN OR ANYWHERE YOU LIKE IN THIS WORLD.

LONG STORY.

GOOD MORNING, GRIMBLE. WHERE'S TRUSTY JOHN? HE'S USUALLY ON DUTY BY NOW.



I'LL BE A SUCK-EGG MULE. IS THAT REALLY YOU, BLUE?

WHERE'VE YOU BEEN? AND WHO'S THAT YOU GOT WITH--



MOVE AWAY FROM HER, BLUE!

I'VE GOT HER COVERED!



NO! NO, GRIMBLE!

SHE'S NOT BABA YAGA! THIS ONE'S THE ORIGINAL. I SWEAR IT!

SHE'S SAFE! HONEST!

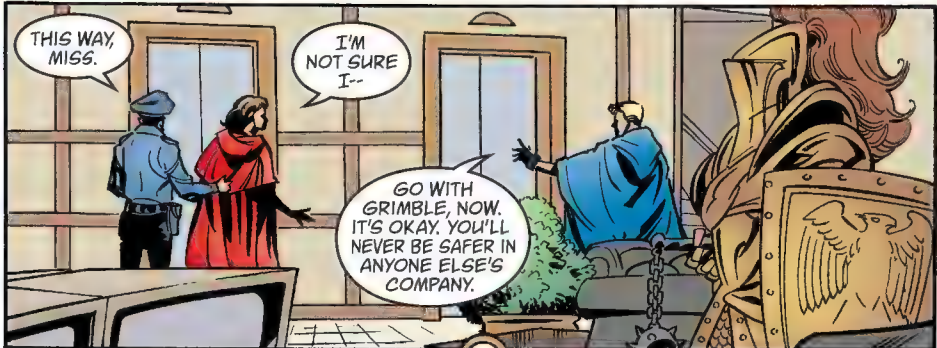
IT'S A VERY LONG STORY, AND I'LL TELL IT TO YOU IN FULL, BUT LATER, OKAY?

FOR NOW, TRUST ME, SHE'S THE REAL DEAL AND THE MOST NON-DANGEROUS FABLE YOU'LL EVER MEET.



GOOD. WE'VE TAKEN THE FIRST STEP. WE CAN GET THROUGH THIS.

DO ME A FAVOR, GRIMBLE, AND SHOW MISS RIDING HOOD INTO ONE OF THE GUEST SUITES. I REALLY NEED TO CHECK IN WITH THE BUSINESS OFFICE BEFORE WORD GETS AROUND THAT I'M BACK.



THIS WAY, MISS.

I'M NOT SURE I--

GO WITH GRIMBLE, NOW. IT'S OKAY. YOU'LL NEVER BE SAFER IN ANYONE ELSE'S COMPANY.



TIME PASSES AND WORD INEVITABLY GETS AROUND.

IS IT TRUE?

BABA YAGA ESCAPED FROM THE WITCHING WELL?

I HEARD SHE BROUGHT **BLUEBEARD** BACK WITH HER!

NO, IT WAS BOY BLUE.

IS THAT A NEW HAIRCUT, SHERIFF?

HE TURNED EVIL TOO? WHEN WILL IT STOP?

GO HOME! WE'LL MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT LATER!

WHY WON'T YOU LET US IN?

DID BABA YAGA TAKE OVER THE WOODLAND?

ARE YOU IN HER THRALL?

THINK THE SHERIFF CAN CALM THEM DOWN?

I HOPE SO, FLY, OR I MIGHT HAVE TO TAKE A DIRECT HAND.

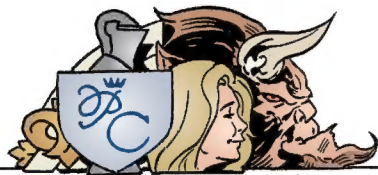
IT'LL GET BLOODY FOR SURE IF THAT HAPPENS.

EITHER WAY, WE'VE GOT DAYS OF UNREST AHEAD. IT'S NOT ALL BAD NEWS THOUGH. I'M GLAD TO HAVE BLUE BACK. MISSED HIM MORE THAN I REALIZED.

ME TOO. I NEARLY **DIED** WHEN I FIRST SAW HIM-- LITERALLY.

I SLIPPED IN MY OWN MOP WATER AND BASHED MY MELON SOMETHING **AWFUL** ON THE MARBLE FLOOR.





BUFKIN ACTED THE CRAZIEST, THOUGH. I THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE A WHOLE BUNCH OF HOURS AND A WHOLE BUNCH OF HALF-HOURS TO PRY THAT MONKEY OFF POOR BLUE'S HEAD.

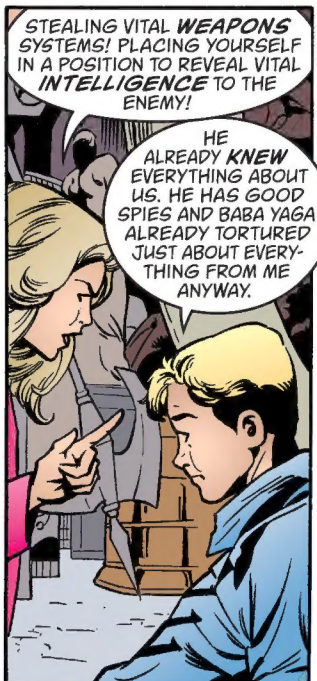
ARE THEY STILL READING BLUE THE RIOT ACT IN THE BUSINESS OFFICE?

OH YEAH. THEY'RE AWFULLY MAD AT HIM.



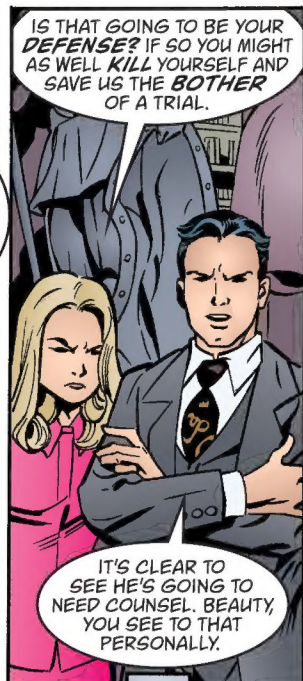
YOU COMMITTED JUST ABOUT EVERY SORT OF CRIME IT'S POSSIBLE FOR A FABLE TO COMMIT!

YOU DAMNED FOOL KID! MOST OF WHAT YOU DID COUNTS AS TREASON AGAINST FABLE-TOWN! WE'LL HAVE THE DEVIL'S OWN TIME KEEPING YOU AWAY FROM THE CHOPPING BLOCK!



STEALING VITAL WEAPONS SYSTEMS! PLACING YOURSELF IN A POSITION TO REVEAL VITAL INTELLIGENCE TO THE ENEMY!

HE ALREADY *KNEW* EVERYTHING ABOUT US. HE HAS GOOD SPIES AND BABA YAGA ALREADY TORTURED JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING FROM ME ANYWAY.



IS THAT GOING TO BE YOUR DEFENSE? IF SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL KILL YOURSELF AND SAVE US THE BOTHER OF A TRIAL.

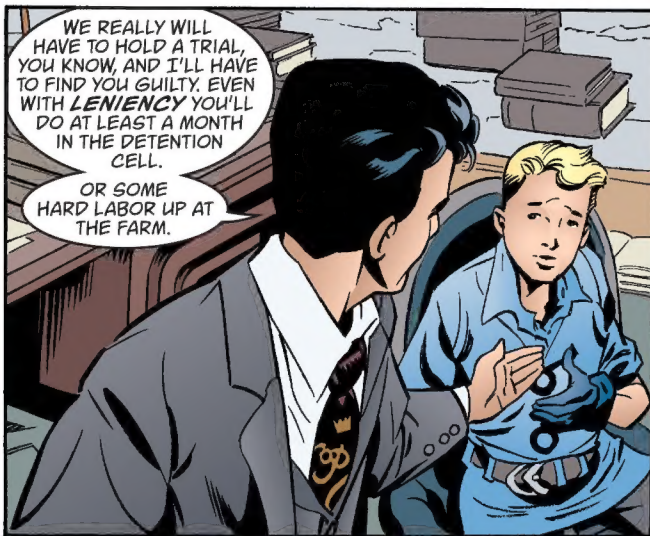
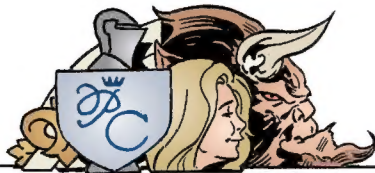
IT'S CLEAR TO SEE HE'S GOING TO NEED COUNSEL, BEAUTY, YOU SEE TO THAT PERSONALLY.



DO IT NOW, AND FIND SOMEONE GOOD. I WANT TO HOLD THE HEARING IMMEDIATELY AND BLUE'S GOING TO NEED THE BEST.

I'M ON IT.





WE REALLY WILL HAVE TO HOLD A TRIAL, YOU KNOW, AND I'LL HAVE TO FIND YOU GUILTY. EVEN WITH **LENIENCY** YOU'LL DO AT LEAST A MONTH IN THE DETENTION CELL.

OR SOME HARD LABOR UP AT THE FARM.



OTHERWISE NO ONE WILL BELIEVE YOU WERE ACTING ON YOUR OWN.

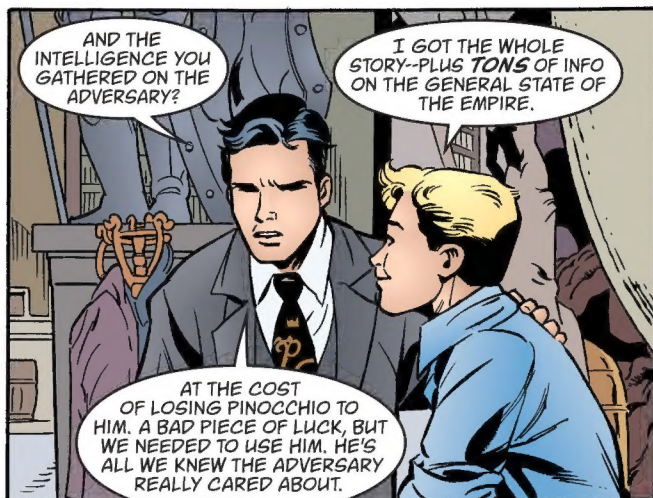
I UNDERSTAND, SIR. I KNEW THAT GOING IN.

HOW DID THE CLOAK WORK?



PERFECTLY. I ONLY WISH I'D KNOWN HOW TO FULLY UTILIZE ITS ABILITIES BACK AT THE KEEP AT WORLD'S END.

IF I DID, I BELIEVE I COULD'VE WON THAT BATTLE ON MY OWN.



AND THE INTELLIGENCE YOU GATHERED ON THE ADVERSARY?

I GOT THE WHOLE STORY—PLUS **TONS** OF INFO ON THE GENERAL STATE OF THE EMPIRE.

AT THE COST OF LOSING PINOCCHIO TO HIM. A BAD PIECE OF LUCK, BUT WE NEEDED TO USE HIM. HE'S ALL WE KNEW THE ADVERSARY REALLY CARED ABOUT.



YOU DID **WELL**, SON. BETTER THAN WE DARED HOPE. TAKE A FEW HOURS BEFORE I HAVE TO THROW YOU IN THE SLAMMER.



YOU'LL HAVE TIME TO WRITE YOUR FULL REPORT IN JAIL. IN THE MEANTIME, GO CLEAN UP, SEE SOME FRIENDS, AND VISIT THAT GIRL OF YOURS.

SHE'S NOT MY GIRL, SIR. TURNS OUT SHE'S A **STRANGER** TO ME.

ALWAYS WAS, IN FACT.

NEXT:
A NEW
STORY-
LINE



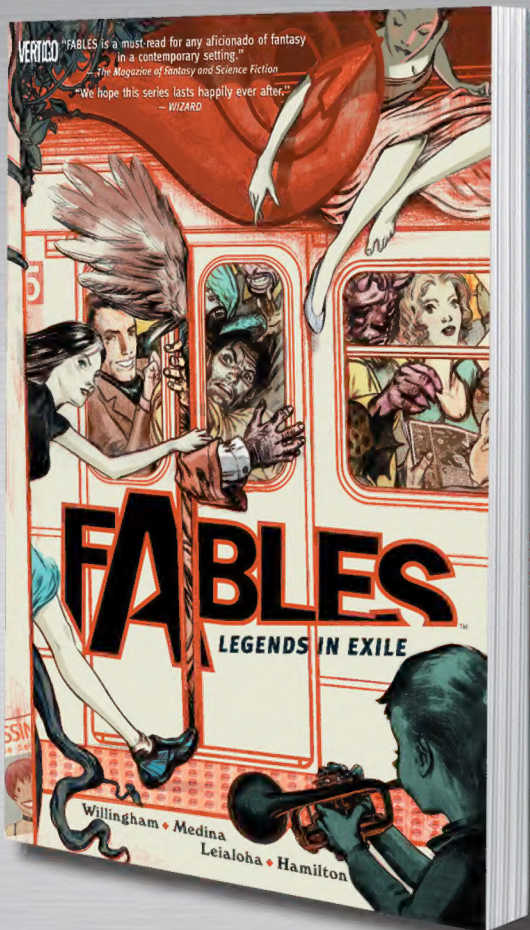
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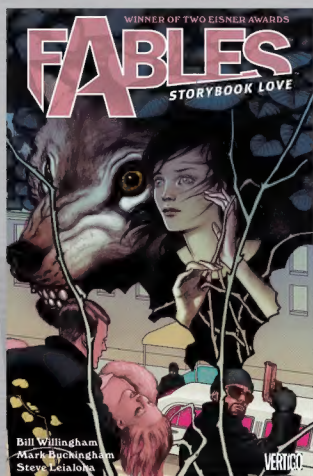
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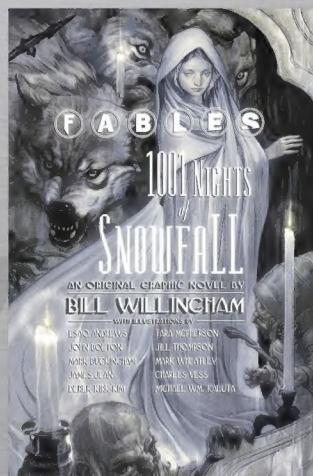
FABLES VOL. 3:
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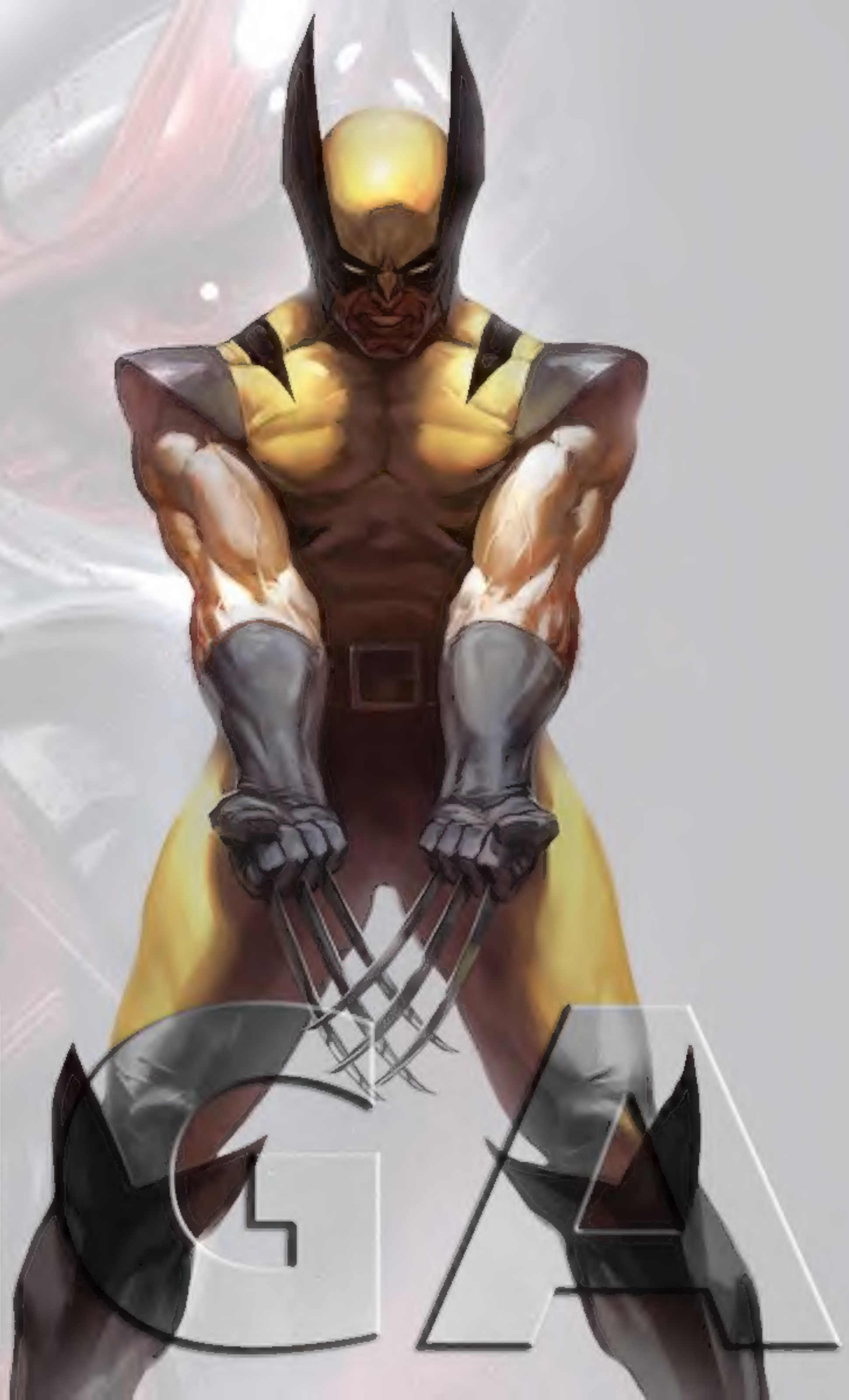


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